

COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and
restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.
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Linoleum

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When Albert Seeley converted the Casa de Bandini into the Cosmopolitan Hotel in 1869, he did not install bathrooms. However, a few homes in the U.S. at the time had recently converted rooms to become bathrooms. Besides plumbing, there was another important issue, the floor. Most rooms of the time had wooden floors, which could be covered with rugs, or even carpet. The first U.S. carpets were produced in 1791 when William Sprague started the first woven carpet mill in Philadelphia. The industry really took off in 1839, when Erastus Bigelow invented the power loom for weaving carpets. But water and rugs or carpet is not a good mix. Even varnished wood is not impermeable to water, which could spill out of a tub, or worse, the toilet. Tile would have been an option, having been used as far back as the Romans, but tile does not work well over wood, as wooden floors move and could crack

the tiles or grout. However, there was a more "modern" option, linoleum.

Linoleum the word is derived from the Latin words linum, which means flax, and the oleum, which means oil.

Linoleum was invented in 1860, by rubber manufacturer Fredrick Walton, who received a British patent 3 years later. He was looking for a rubber substitute, and got his inspiration by observing the skin produced by oxidized linseed oil. It was Scottish flooring manufacturer Michael Nairn that made it famous as a floor covering by introducing inlaid patterns. Within 5 years of it being patented, linoleum flooring was being shipped to the United States. The first U.S. manufacturer, the Joseph Wild Co. (later the American Linoleum Company), began production in 1874 on Staten Island. Thomas Armstrong, founder of a cork cutting company saw linoleum production as a use for his companies wasted cork powder. In a factory build near Lancaster Pennsylvania, the Armstrong Company produced brighter colors, and sold its flooring as a way to increase status, beginning in 1909. It

is a leading manufacturer of linoleum today.

Unlike vinyl flooring - made from chlorinated petrochemical materials, and started to become popular in the late 1940s -- linoleum is made from all natural materials: Linseed oil, made by pressing the seeds of the flax plant; Rosin, tapped from pine trees, without affecting growth; Wood flour, a very fine saw dust; Cork flour, made by grinding the bark of the cork oak, (the bark is peeled every seven to ten years without affecting the tree's growth); Limestone, very finely ground; natural pigments; and Jute, a fibrous plant.

After being outsold by vinyl for decades, linoleum is making a comeback in the 21st century, in part due to its natural content and it is 100% biodegradable, but also because it is more durable.

